

SAMPLE
TRANSLATION

TADEJ GOLOB
WHERE HAD BRINA
GONE?

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Tadej Golob: Where Had Brina Gone?

What would Jack Sparrow do?

He almost shouted this at the top of his voice and I had to shush him and tell him to calm down and tell me very quietly, because I was scared that the man would hear and he would then know about the plan, especially if it was a good one, which I wasn't quite sure of.

"Listen," he said, "do you remember what I wrote that time about the dogs that are taken by bad guys and then escape?"

I said yes, I remembered how Metka bit one of them and then the others escaped from the cage and ran outside, and he couldn't catch them because his leg hurt. But it wasn't clear to me how that was of help to us. Were we supposed to bite his leg? And what connection did that have with Ulysses?

"No," he said, again quite loud and once more I had to put my finger to my lips and say shush, and he then carried on in a whisper. "Metka did the same as Ulysses, I get it now. He blinded the Cyclops, she bit the guy so he couldn't go after them, but it's the same thing! We must do something so that we get away and he can't go after us."

I still didn't understand. How could we blind him without poking something in his eye?

"You see that bucket of paint?" he said, pointing to the only wall not covered with greenery, which was freshly painted and with a bucket of paint standing in front of it. "Well, we pour it on his head and it will blind him and he won't be able to follow us."

Then he pointed above the door, where there was a beam that ran right across the middle, and if we put the bucket of paint there and tipped it on him... Lovro pulled the leads from his pocket that we had brought to fasten the dogs to and waved them in front of me.

"We've got everything we need!"

I was thinking when he shouted:

"We've got the paint, the leads..."

"How will you get it on the beam?"

"A ladder!" he shouted. "We've got a ladder!"

I looked at him and thought about it and yes, we had everything we needed. And when I realised that I started to tremble with fear.

"Lovro," I said, "dare you do it?"

He shook his head uncertainly.

“I don’t know.”

“If we fail the bad guy will be very angry.”

He looked at the bucket of paint and the ceiling and the ladder, weighing things up.

“We’ll succeed,” he said, “because we have to.”

We went over to the painted wall and in the bucket there was some greasy white paint with a thin crust on the surface and a roller sticking out from it. We took the roller out and put it on the floor, so that we could tip the paint over the bad guy and blind him. We picked up the bucket and it was so heavy it took the two of us to carry it to the door and in between we had to rest twice. We brought the ladder, which was fortunately lighter, and leaned it against the beam. Then we lifted the bucket and I climbed up the ladder dragging it behind me, while Lovro pushed it upwards, resting it on the rungs so that we could catch our breaths. Eventually we succeeded. We tied the lead to the handle – in fact, we had to tie all the leads together so that they reached the ground, and that was at an angle because we wanted to pull the bucket over onto the bad guy when he opened the door, and we needed to be behind the door so that he wouldn’t see us. We moved the ladder and assessed our trap. We were pleased that everything was ready and that nothing could be seen unless you immediately looked up.

“Now we have to wait for him to come, so we can tip the paint on his head,” said Lovro, but I shook my head.

“What?”

“We can’t wait. He is not alone, we saw there are three of them and if reinforcements come in the meantime then our plan is no use. We have to get him here.”

“But how?” he asked.

“Just like the first time.”

I pointed to the plants on the ground.

“Should we knock them off the shelves?”

“No,” I said, “we’ll tip over a cupboard so that he’s bound to hear and to come. If we throw one plant at a time maybe he won’t, but then when he does come he’ll have the other two with him and he’ll be even angrier.”

He stood next to the cupboard and gave it a gentle push. It didn’t budge. He pushed harder and it swayed a little.

“Okay, let’s do it,” he said and I saw that he was shaking more than the cupboard. So was I.

We stood next to the cupboard and leaned against it.

“On the count of three,” I said and counted and when I said three we pushed, the cupboard leaned, we pushed harder and the cupboard began to topple over, slowly at first but then quickly, dragging down two others with it. It sounded like a plane crashing.

We rushed to the door, knelt down and grabbed hold of the lead. Nothing.

“He didn’t hear,” said Lovro.

At first nothing happened and I thought that was it, that he hadn’t heard and then the lock creaked, the door opened, blocking his view of us, and through the gap between the door and the wall we saw the man staring at the fallen cupboard. He took a step forward.

“What the...”

We pulled on the lead with all our might.

Chapter 29

Flight

The plastic bucket tipped over and fell on his head, and because it was quite heavy the man fell to the ground and we didn't even see whether the paint covered him or not. One of the reasons we didn't see was that we dashed round the door and past him into the night, which was completely black because inside there were so many lights and when we got outside we stopped as if blinded. We blinked and didn't know which way to go, but I quickly turned on the head torch that hung round my neck, and so did Lovro. We ran towards the bamboo hedge and the gap we had come through to the back of the house. Lovro wriggled through the gap, while I popped back to the corner of the house for the rucksack, where I had my phone, so as to ring my dad. But when I bent over to pick it up I saw the man coming round the corner and he looked like a ghost, his head all white, and he was staggering around as if he was drunk. He saw me and turned in my direction, I dropped the rucksack and rushed for the gap and started to wriggle through. I was almost on the other side, Lovro had taken my hand and was pulling, when my t-shirt was grabbed from behind. I screamed in fright and threw myself forward. There was a ripping sound, my t-shirt tore and I fell forward onto Lovro and then both of us fell onto the ground.

Lovro picked himself up and started to head down the street towards our flats, but I grabbed his shoulder.

"Not there!" I said, for I knew that the bad guy would appear through the gate from the plant nursery and catch us. I ran towards the woods because they were very close with Lovro close behind me, and in a few seconds we were among the trees. We ran on but it was difficult because the light from our torches was so weak and they were still hanging round our necks, so the beam danced among the branches and leaves and roots and stumps. But at least we had them, which the bad guy didn't, so we thought that he wouldn't be able to follow us.

After a while we stopped and listened. I told Lovro to switch off his torch and I did the same and then we squatted down next to a large tree, I think it was a spruce, and listened. At first we could hear nothing, but then in the distance we heard footsteps along the road and then the breaking of branches and the rustling of leaves when the man entered the woods. Lovro huddled up to me, agitated. He took my hand and squeezed. I was also agitated, but I knew that we should not move.

"Stay completely still," I whispered in his ear.

He squeezed my hand even harder.

The breaking of branches and rustling of leaves grew ever louder and it seemed as if he was heading straight for us.

Lovro held my hand so tight it hurt.

I could already see the man, like a shadow moving through the trees. A black shadow that was lighter at the top, white. I didn't know what to do. Should we make a run for it while we had the chance, or hunker down and wait for him to go past? And because I didn't know it was too late to do anything but wait, because the man was barely two metres away and looking straight at us. He was leaning against a tree and looking at us. I didn't move, I wasn't even breathing.

He spat towards us and I shuddered and almost ran. Lovro dug his nails into my hand. I could clearly hear the breathing of the bad guy with the paint on his head and his sniffing and even, it seemed, the beat of his heart, although of course I couldn't really hear that... And then the man spat once more, cursed, turned slowly and disappeared into the darkness.

We were completely quiet and didn't move an inch until the cracking and rustling faded away and it was just us and the woods. Lovro was still gripping my hand.

"You're hurting me," I said and he let go.

"What now?" he asked.

"I don't know," I replied, because I couldn't think, I was still trembling so much.

And then I calmed down and was able to think and I thought that it would be best if we waited a bit to make sure that no one else was after us, and then try to find our way off Rožnik hill in case the bad guy got a torch and came back with the others to find us.

"We'll wait here," I said, "then we'll try to find our way off Rožnik on the other side and get home."

He said okay and for some time we squatted in the darkness.

"Is that enough?" he asked.

"Yes, I think so."

I turned on my torch and I soon as I did so I heard branches cracking and leaves rustling and someone running towards us. I turned it off again and crouched down behind the tree and hoped that the noise would stop, but it didn't and this time it was heading straight for us, not a little to the right and a little to the left like before but directly towards us, and quickly too. I grabbed Lovro's hand and told him to run after me, to run as fast as the wind and not to switch our torches on, because I thought that if we couldn't see neither could the bad guy and he couldn't catch us. We ran into the darkness, barely able to see the trunks and branches of the trees, and the branches were hitting our faces and our arms that we held up to protect us, but the noise kept getting nearer, the sound of someone running, and when it got really close I speeded up

and tripped on something and fell. I pulled Lovro down, too, and he rolled past me, and as I lay on the ground I covered my eyes because I didn't want to see the terrible face of the man, white with paint and with anger.

Chapter 30

Little Brina

Something bent over me. My heart stopped and I waited for my hair to be grabbed and to be pulled up and that would be that. Something sniffed me from close up and then again and again, and then licked me. I opened my eyes and saw a dark nose and a wet tongue and a long jaw and friendly eyes glittering in the dark and it was Brina. I raised myself up a little and hugged her and Brina whined and whimpered as she did, wagging her tail like crazy.

"Lovro," I called. "Lovro, look, it's Brina!"

Lovro appeared from behind a tree trunk a little below us. First just his head peeped out, then he crept out of his shelter and showed himself. I turned on my torch and put it on my head and saw that his face was filthy from soil and the tears that were still flowing. Brina bounded over to him and began licking his face and he hugged her and laughed. "My Brina, my Brina," he said, calmer now that Brina was with us and we were safe because she would bite anyone that tried to harm us. Actually, I was not so sure about this because Brina was not a big dog and not aggressive, but I was also delighted that she was with us. She would certainly bark, in her funny way.

We sat there for a while and Brina calmed down a little and squeezed between us and rested, and only then did I notice that she was thinner and very dirty. God knows what she had been doing since she became lost, for now I knew she had been lost and not kidnapped.

"Isn't it funny," I said to Lovro, "that we were looking for Brina and we found her, but by mistake?"

He laughed, pushing her away because she was still licking his face.

I listened to see if anyone else was making their way towards us but I heard nothing.

"What now?" asked Lovro.

The woods were dark and quiet. Quiet in their own way. If you listened hard enough you could hear all sorts of things, but I knew that already because I had slept outside before with dad and mum, and I wasn't afraid. What I was really afraid of could not be heard.

"Let's try and find our way out of the woods and go home."

“Which way?” asked Lovro.

There were no paths anywhere, because we were surrounded by darkness and trees, and we could see no lights, so I decided to head uphill, we had to, and sooner or later we could get to the top of Rožnik, to the inn and the church, from where a road led downwards, and from there I knew the way home. We kept stopping to rest because we were tired and sleepy and thirsty. Our food and water were in the rucksack that got left behind at the plant nursery.

When we had been walking for some time and still not got anywhere and we were resting again I said maybe it was pointless walking in the dark if we didn't know which way we were going, we could be going in circles, and it would be better to spend the night here and wait for daylight, and then it should be easy to find the way. Lovro said we could, the only thing he was worried about was that we would die of thirst.

I suggested making a bivouac and Lovro immediately said yes. We collected some sticks and put them round the tree trunk, like a tent in which we could hide and spend the night. Brina was giving us strange looks, as if she was thinking that we wanted to play with sticks, but she was also tired and probably starving, so she couldn't be bothered. Over the large sticks we laid smaller ones until the frame around the tree trunk was thick enough that we could heap leaves on it and the shelter was complete. We learned this once with dad and mum in the mountains, when we had slept in the woods. Dad had sniffed the bivouac that stood in the mountain pasture and muttered that it was stuffy and damp and that we would build our own. We did so and got inside to sleep and at first I was afraid to be sleeping in the woods, but then I fell asleep. But when I woke up there was a tin roof above me and we were in the other bivouac. It had started to rain during the night and mum and dad had carried us there without us noticing because we were sleeping so soundly.

Now I was no longer afraid of the dark and the night in the woods. I would only be scared if I heard footsteps or saw a light, because if anyone is up to no good at night in the woods it is a man, not a tree or one of the animals that live there. They just want to be left alone and if you do that they leave you alone, too.

We sat beneath the branches and leaves. Lovro and I leaned against the tree trunk, our shoulders touching, with Brina in our laps. If she was a cat she would have been purring, but she was completely quiet and fast asleep. We didn't sleep, although we were tired, because we were thirsty and getting cold. Brina warmed us a little, but our top halves were cold because we were wearing only t-shirts. What's more, mine was badly torn. Lovro was shivering and then his teeth started to chatter.

“I'm cold,” he complained. “At first I thought I would die of thirst, but now I see I'll freeze to death.”

I replied that he would not die and that I was cold, too. The only one who was not cold was Brina, for she was covered with hair and although it was short it was curly, and she was covering her nose with her front paws. And we were also warming her from underneath.

We sat for quite some time like this, I don't know how long because we didn't have a watch with us, and then I also started to feel so cold that my teeth were chattering and I knew we couldn't wait until morning. I stroked Brina's head but she didn't move. I felt bad about having to wake her up as she was sleeping so nicely, but I had no choice.

"Shall we go?" I asked Lovro.

"Where?" he said, sounding frozen.

"Onwards. To find the way home. If we move we'll warm up a bit."

We cautiously lifted Brina, she woke and stood up. Still half asleep she looked around wondering what was happening. Lovro hugged her round the neck and said he was sorry to wake her, but that we must go on and if she knew the way to lead us. How can she know the way if she is lost? I thought, but I didn't say anything and we started walking.

Chapter 31

Rožnik at night

We didn't go uphill because we are too tired, but to the left. I thought that if we went to the left we would reach the playground at Mostec and from there cross the road near the duck pond and follow the cycle path home. I went first, Lovro behind me and then Brina, who was walking hesitantly as if unsure we were doing the right thing. If she had her way she would sleep till dawn and then get a dish of kibble and a bowl of water, and then she would fetch sticks. Unfortunately that wasn't possible and she had to accept it.

Lovro was walking silently right behind me and he kept bumping into me so I told him not to walk so close. Once he asked me if I knew where we were going and I said I did, though I didn't, and once when we were resting under a dead tree and we could see the stars through the dead branches, he asked if I thought we could navigate by the stars like sailors did. Perhaps we could, but we'd have to know the stars.

"If we could find the North Star we would know where north was," he said.

"And how would that help?"

"Our room faces north," he explained, "so then we would know which way we needed to go to get to it."

That was true, that our room faced north, because dad had often said it was good that we had an apartment that faced three different directions. Their room faces east and the kitchen, which is also a living room and has a balcony, faces south and a little to the west. Because of that the laundry on the balcony dries quickly and below it there is a beautiful maple tree that dad can touch if he leans from the balcony, although we can't. When the men who had been doing up the apartment left and we moved in a young sparrow had flown onto the balcony. It sat on the railing, not at all afraid of dad, who was hanging the washing. Usually mum did that and he washed the dishes, but this time it was him. We gave the sparrow some water and biscuit, but it wouldn't eat and sat in the corner, waiting.

"What is it waiting for?" I asked dad and he said its mother, and that it had probably fallen out of the nest and that he hoped the mother would come for it because we couldn't put it back and it wouldn't eat. Then he looked to see where the nest could be and he saw sparrows flying from a gutter right at the top of the building and he knew he couldn't get up there even though he knew how to climb. In the afternoon the mother sparrow appeared and the baby sparrow flew with her to the maple tree and then disappeared.

I was a little jealous that Lovro had remembered about the North Star, although I couldn't quite see how the star could tell us exactly where our room was, and if there was an East Star mam

and dad's room, and a South Star for the living room, but I didn't say that to Lovro. Instead I said to him to think about which was the North Star. He looked at the sky for some time and then he said he didn't know, that there were too many, but he thought it was that one and he pointed to a particular star. There really were a lot of them because it was a clear night and I wasn't sure which star he was pointing to. Brina was happy whenever we stopped and immediately fell asleep, and then she was surprised each time we carried on.

Eventually, when we were very tired, we reached a fence. It was a wire mesh fence and very high, and we thought it strange that there was a fence in the middle of the woods, where there were no houses, only trees. We followed it because there was a kind of path and it was the first one we had found and I knew we had to take it because it was sure to lead to a wider path and that to a road. Brina livened up. She was running round us, getting under our feet and constantly sniffing the fence. Maybe she can smell a dog, I thought, because if there is a fence there is probably some kind of guard dog.

"What's wrong, Brina?" I asked, frightened.

Brina had suddenly stopped, tensing her front legs and leaning back, and started to growl towards the fence in the darkness. First she growled and then she barked, which usually sounded funny but this time didn't. Lovro was also scared and he tried to drag Brina forward by the collar to get her away from there, but she dug her paws in and he couldn't shift her. I leaned against the fence and looked through the wire mesh to try and see what was upsetting Brina, and when I switched on my head torch I saw two yellow circles shining and heard a hissing noise and then the circles moved towards me, stopping at the fence. I fell backwards and then scrambled up and we ran, away from the animal that was pursuing us. Brina kept stopping to yap at it and the enormous cat hissed at us through the fence until we ran so far that we could no longer hear it. Lovro and I lay on the ground because we couldn't run any more, whatever happened. Brina fussed around us, agitated, licking our legs and hands. She seemed proud to have defended us against a monster, which she thought she had driven away, and at the same time relieved that we were together because she was also afraid.

"What was that?" asked Lovro.

"A gigantic cat..." I said and then I thought about it and then I knew which cat, and then I also knew where we were.

Chapter 32

Brina!

“It was a lynx,” I said. “And we are next to the fence of the zoo and just below the inn on Rožnik.”

And then Lovro remembered that once we had been with some friends at the inn and that we had then gone down a very steep path into the woods and there was an enclosure with lynxes, at the back of the zoo. But that was during the day and we had spent quite a bit of time looking for the lynxes before we managed to spot one, and he lay on a fallen tree and did not move even when we called to him. Lovro even threw a pine cone over the fence, but he missed the lynx. And if we went now back to the enclosure and then straight up, we would come to the inn and the road.

Lovro did not want to go back and I also knew that I wouldn't even if there were a hundred fences between the lynx and us, and so we had no choice but to keep following the path along the fence. Lovro was muttering that he didn't know if this was wise because in the zoo there were also wolves and bears and every other kind of beast including a Siberian tiger, but I reassured him that these were nearer the centre of the zoo and that it was not a Siberian but a Bengal tiger, which is smaller. At the edge there was only the lynx and after that, as far as I remembered, only herbivorous animals. Chamois, ibex, mouflon and maybe the odd owl and a wild cat, but the wild cat was much smaller than a lynx and was almost like a regular cat.

Lovro said he was even afraid of wild cats and he didn't know if he would ever again be able to stroke the cat at gran's in Lenart, because the lynx had frightened him so much, but we carried on walking. Every so often Brina sniffed the path and the fence, and when large shadows appeared Lovro and I ran as fast as we could, but nothing hissed or growled or barked like before near the lynx enclosure, but only made a clopping noise and so we came to a wide path that led downwards.

We sat down to rest because Lovro looked so tired, although he didn't complain at all. I told him we were very near now and it wouldn't take us too much longer. Such a wide path must lead to the road.

“How does your story end?” asked Lovro.

“Which story?”

“The one about Piko the dog.”

I smiled because I had forgotten that I had written that story.

It seemed so long ago, although in fact it was only yesterday.

“I don’t know yet,” I said and that I hadn’t finished it, and that I’d got to the point where Heidi helps the dogs get away and they still faced with a long journey home, full of adventures.

“How would you like it to end?” I asked.

“That the dogs get home safely and that they all live together happily,” he said tearfully.

“Okay,” I said and that he should stop crying because I would tell him how the story ended. I thought a moment and then began:

When they were all gathered together Heidi told them to run to the woods and hide there, and the next day they would carry on heading north. Because if they went north – and she showed them the North Star, because she knew where it was, even though she was blind – they would come to the railway station. There they should look for a goods train on which it said Ljubljana, Slovenia. They should get onto it without being seen and lie low until they saw Mount Triglav in the distance, then they would know they were home.

Piko jumped into her lap and licked her nose. Heidi laughed and Piko woofed several times and the dogs knew what he had said.

“That he loved her?” asked Lovro.

“Not just that,” I said.

Piko said that he had heard from his mistress the story of Kekec and Mojca, who was blind, and Auntie Pehta who lived in the mountains and collected healing herbs. She collected them and made infusions from them and kept them in small bottles. She didn’t want to give them to people who behaved badly towards her and accused her of being wicked. And she slowly had become wicked because if people are horrible to you that’s what happens. It’s the same with animals, because if you beat a dog he may bite you, but not just you, others as well. Pehta caught Kekec and wouldn’t let him go, but Kekec escaped because he got her dog on his side, because he didn’t beat him.

“And what connection does Kekec have with Heidi?” asked Lovro.

“Listen,” I said.

Piko said that when they got back to Slovenia he would look for Pehta, who still lived in the mountains near Triglav, and ask her for some herbal medicine which he would send to Heidi to put on her eyes so that she would no longer be blind.

The dogs ran to the woods and hid there. Heidi stood in front of the house waving and then she went to bed. The dogs did what she had told them and in two days they got back to Slovenia.

“Did Piko find Pehta?”

“Yes,” I said.

“Did he take the medicine to Heidi? And how did he do it?”

I said that he had done everything and that Heidi got the herbs and that I’d tell him about it some other time, because that was another story and we had to move on.

We got up and went along the wide path, which went steeply down, but then levelled out and became easier. Brina was once more walking nicely alongside us because the path was wide enough for us all. We went on in this way for some time and the trees slowly thinned out and on our left something appeared, though we didn’t see what it was until Brina pricked up her ears and dashed through the trees towards it.

We carefully moved through the spruces in the same direction. When we saw the open space we froze in horror. We were standing on the edge of the plant nursery and on the other side, between two houses, stood Brina, sniffing at a Labrador with small eyes.